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THE

Commonweal

The Age of Advertising

By Marshall McLuhan

CATHOLICS AND SOCIAL REFORM

by Edward Marciniak

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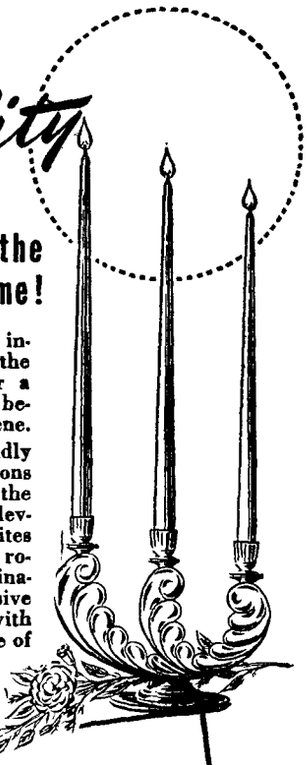

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THE

Commonweal

week by week

NATURE OF THE CHALLENGE

FAILURE to capitalize on the disparity between the utopia promised by the Communists and the realities of life in the Soviet Union has long dogged our efforts in the cold war. Knowledge of the slave labor camps, with their millions of human victims, has not itself proved sufficient to dissuade many resentful intellectuals and workers in lands outside the Iron Curtain. And the fact that, generally, civil liberties are flagrantly violated in the USSR is still dismissed by some as a necessary stage on the way to a prosperous, policeless society.

Yet, as the class structure has hardened within the Soviet Union with the passage of years, the ruling bureaucrats—and the artists, scientists and technicians supported by the government—have been developing a heavily vested interest in perpetuating the totalitarian regime. For while the Russian masses are limited to the bare essentials of material existence, the new bureaucracy contrives to live rather well, even by Western standards. Differences in the Russian standards of living are, in fact, much more marked than in the United States. Mr. Malenkov's recent promise of greater production of consumers' goods but underlines those differences. In any case the privileged few are said to be far more intent on preserving their present position than in advancing a future cause which for them has lost its dynamism. As Waldemar Gurian once predicted, perpetuation in power has become confused with the cause itself.

Where are the real Communists who are still making every sacrifice to bring the Russian version of the Marxist gospel to the exploited in the world? Apparently few of them can be found among the satellite nations of Eastern Europe. For the Soviet Union has a tendency to liquidate local Communists once it has consolidated its control. And the postwar years under the Russian yoke have aroused only a nationwide desire for liberation in Poland, Czechoslovakia and East Germany—as is repeatedly demonstrated.

The convinced Communists that exist today tend to reside either in China or outside the Iron Curtain. They have considerable strength in France and Italy, virtually no following in the Anglo-Saxon countries. Where human exploitation is rampant, the Communists are expert in making capital of it. Accordingly they have developed important followings in Southeast Asia, are growing stronger in Latin America and the Near East, and constitute a potential threat throughout the whole colonial world.

IF WE Americans are fortunate that the actualities of the Soviet paradise do not embody more of a challenge to our own imperfect society, that does not remove the threat of Communism in the world. The loss of the important American Communist following of the early nineteen thirties should not permit us to rest easy. For there still are fanatical men and women ready to fight and die for the cause of Communism in many lands. There are even conspirators in certain American labor unions who by their tenacity and skill—and because of the comparative lethargy of their democratic-minded fellow members—have fashioned their unions into instruments of Kremlin policy. There are also spies and enemy agents. And always in the background is the powerful Russian war machine equipped with the latest weapons.

Where does the Communism of today get its ideological driving force? How is it still able to sway millions? Chiefly because it supplies a place to go—for intellectuals who find only frustration in their present environment and for peasants and industrial workers in many lands resentful of their virtual serfdom. So strong is their feeling that anything would be better than the evils that beset them, that they are willing to risk even the rigors of a dictatorial Soviet regime.

Communism as a protest against injustice, poverty, hopelessness is a powerful idea. It often

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takes the play from the proponents of the democratic freedoms. For attempts to solve the problems of poverty in the world encounter many obstacles. Custom is stubborn, lethargy frequently endemic, and the men through whom foreign aid is administered often inefficient if not downright venal. To arouse resentment among the downtrodden is a much simpler task.

If in the war of ideas Communism derives its greatest strength from its ability to serve as a focus of protest against injustice in the world, the nature of its challenge is plain enough. And to meet that challenge successfully in the hearts of men the course is also clear. With those who desperately seek for bread, the stone of bare denunciation continues to avail but little.

OZANAM'S CENTENARY

ONE of the marvels often recorded of new religious orders is the rapidity with which they multiply during and immediately after each founder's lifetime. A similar growth has been registered by the St. Vincent de Paul Society—which is not a religious order but a series of small lay groups that meet each week to further their own spiritual life and provide for the poor of their respective neighborhoods.

It was founded by a French layman, Frederic Ozanam, the centenary of whose death is being celebrated this month the world over. Ozanam founded the work when still a student at the University of Paris in answer to the skeptics who asked him: "If Christianity is true, as you claim, where are its works?" The Society still bears the marks of its academic origin in the name "conference" by which each parish group is formally designated.

Because of Frederic Ozanam there are today thousands of men united in a spiritual brotherhood of prayer, meditation and almsgiving. Two by two, under the cover of night to conceal their ministrations from the inquisitive, these valiant laymen go about giving material and spiritual aid. And some of them are engaged in such special works as visiting shut-ins, the hospitalized and those in prison. In imitation of Frederic Ozanam, and in line with the traditions he established as a young man, the members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society go about supplying for our own lack of solicitude for our neighbor. They provide one unmistakable answer to the demand for works.

REALIGNMENT?

CERTAIN of the Southern Democrats have announced that they will not attend the party conference in Chicago which has been called to honor Adlai Stevenson and at the same time consider the future of the party. Senator Holland of Florida said frankly that he was boycotting the meeting because he felt the Southern wing of the party was being slighted by the present leadership. Georgia's Senators Russell and George, Virginia's Senator Byrd and South Carolina's Governor Byrnes are also expected not to show.

During the Presidential campaign Adlai Stevenson used to speak derisively of the two-headed elephant; it would appear that the donkey too is bicephalous. This, though, should surprise no one, for the division between the political left and right cuts through American society—from individual families to the dominating parties. In some social groups one or the other dominates, but some kind of representation is well nigh universal. There is a conservative, or "rightist," faction in the labor movement, and the American Legion is not without its embattled liberals. In shops, offices, schools, even in monasteries, "leftists" and "rightists" (in this limited sense of the words) live and work side by side.

In America, left and right are not so much

NEXT WEEK

VICTOR WHITE asks whether a psychologist can be religious.

"To be interested in religion, or religions, to recognize their functional value in the past, and for particular individuals in the present, is not necessarily to be religious. Indeed such interest in study may possibly prove an obstacle. Religion is rooted in an "I-Thou" relationship: the encounter of a subject with a subject. More precisely, religion means a voluntary attitude of reverence and awe toward the unknown and the unseen. For this, the objectivity of science, even of the scientific psychology of religion, is no substitute. . . . It would perhaps be too much to claim that it is impossible to understand religion, or its psychological function, without oneself sharing religious beliefs and attitudes, but it would be nearer to the truth than to suppose that such understanding can easily be attained by the sort of scientific detachment required by the physical sciences."

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matters of ideology as of emphasis and psychological temperament. (When one moves into the realm of the frozen ideologues he has stepped out of the American scene into an exotic area where neither of the two native groups feels at home.) It is hard to pin down just what distinguishes the native "leftist" from the native "rightist" since they both share the same basic political philosophy, a firm belief in American democracy. But state your issue—the role of the UN, the aims of labor movement, the influence of Senator McCarthy, the matter of immigration—and the basic lineup becomes clear. It is not a cleanly divided partisan lineup by any means. There are Democrats like Senator McCarran who are further right than Republicans like Governor Dewey. We have long since grown used to "liberal" Republicans and "reactionary" Democrats.

For the last three or four Presidential elections the "liberal" wings of both parties have been in the ascendancy. While the Democrats chose Roosevelt, Truman and Stevenson, none of them men of the Democratic right, the Republicans have passed over their between-elections popular heroes, like Senator Taft, and have come forth with liberal standard-bearers like Willkie, Dewey and General Eisenhower. Often the rival candidates were not as far separated as their impassioned campaign oratory would lead one to believe. If you start from the left and move to the center you will not be too far from someone who has moved from the right.

This is the way things have been among us ever since the days of the New Deal. The nation, politically and psychologically, has moved far leftward from the days of Herbert Hoover, and for all the millions of words of condemnation against the Roosevelt revolution, America's seasoned politicians know, and have long known, that you can't put a forthright right-winger in the White House, however loudly his fulminations may be cheered between elections.

But that means also that the "rightists," the conservatives, whatever you choose to call them, have not been able to gain ultimate responsibility in our national life. They have not actually grappled with the problems of the times, for the simple reason that they have not been entrusted with that responsibility. As a result their contribution has been largely a rhetorical one, compounded of disappointment, discouragement and frustration. They have been the jaundiced critics, the obstructionists, the negativists. Actually they have been fulfilling functions historically assigned to the disruptive radical segments of society; they have long been more consistently "agin" than the most irresponsible old-time soapboxer.

It is never good when a sizeable portion of the population goes long unrepresented at the highest levels of government and is deprived of responsibility. As long as the "liberal" elements dominate both parties, right-wing frustration will probably grow. Some people are now talking about a whole new realignment in American politics. Such a realignment seems almost inevitable. How much longer will the "rightists" of both parties be content to leave their conventions, swallow their pride and pitch in to help a candidate who doesn't look much different to them than the fellow the rival party has decided on? Perhaps joined together, the men of the right will be able to make a more persuasive case for their point of view than they have made as minority members in both parties.

CHANGING THE CHARTER

THE ink was hardly dry on the UN charter when people started right in to alter it. Some of those who suggested changes were men of good will, genuinely interested in improving the long-sought international organization. Others who indulged in this particular bent for changing the charter have not, to understate the case, been distinguished by their enthusiasm for the idea of the UN. Indeed, a good many would-be amenders seemed more interested in emasculating than in strengthening the UN charter.

Now Mr. Dulles has added fresh fuel to the flames. At this rather late date, he has announced that changes are in order, specifically mentioning the veto power of the Security Council. Late date, because by now more and more crucial decisions have been shifted to the General Assembly, so that the paralyzing power of the Russian "No!" can be bypassed.

Normally, many men of good will would agree with Mr. Dulles' suggestion that the veto power on the Security Council in many ways constitutes a very real drawback. Yet it should be remembered that one of the reasons for the veto is the belief of the framers that the U.S. would never participate in the UN without a built-in safeguard for national sovereignty. On this point the charter-drafters were probably correct, and impatience with Russian obstructionism should not be allowed to obscure this fact.

Harmful though the veto may have been on occasion, in suggesting its elimination now we think Mr. Dulles has profoundly misjudged the temper

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of the times. Many friends of the UN would hesitate to abolish the veto outright at this point in UN history, and his suggestion for changes has already brought out the enemies of the UN in full cry. The shrill chorus of the anti-UN agitators has been given new authority, and the changes already suggested would hardly strengthen U.S. commitments to the UN.

Judging by the sample outcries already heard, the only revisions in the UN charter satisfactory to these people would be an international organization with a limited membership, composed only of the U.S. and those nations which agree with us right down the line. The way things are going these days, this would have only one advantage, that of economy; Mr. Lodge and the other UN representatives could then hold their meetings of the revised international organization in a hotel room—a small one.

DISAPPEARANCE OF THE UNTOUCHABLES

IT was reported recently that one out of every seven persons in India belonged to the untouchable caste, according to a 1951 census report. Untouchability and all caste discrimination were abolished constitutionally when India gained her independence in 1947. But it takes more than a legal fiat to undo the beliefs, superstitions and ignorance of centuries. The caste system is deep-rooted in the history and culture of India. You can't legislate morality, it is often said, and that is surely true. But certainly laws have often been used effectively to protect human dignity. India is planning to draft a new series of laws which will make it a punishable offense to continue untouchability.

Not too far separated from the same question was a recent survey made by the New York *Times* on the cases in our own country where Negro rights were enforced by law. The *Times* investigated the situation at certain state-supported schools where the Courts had ordered the admittance of duly qualified Negro students. In practically every case there was a great stir at the time of the court decision and widespread predictions of violence. In some cases the Negro students were then rigidly segregated and had to use separate classrooms, a separate dining room and separate toilet facilities. In practically every case, such segregation has since disappeared and the Negro students have been integrated into the general life of the school. There was no sustained violent reaction anywhere. An incident here and there, but nothing like the widespread disorder predicted.

In every case the elaborate segregation apparatus eventually broke down. White students attending these schools came to see that the Negroes were not fundamentally different from themselves. The elimination of segregation was largely a result of student pressure on the administration of the colleges.

BISHOP HAAS

EVEN to those who did not know him personally, news of the death of Bishop Francis J. Haas was bound to come with a great sense of shock. For Bishop Haas was so active that it was easy to forget that he was sixty-four years old, and over the years his contributions to Catholic social thought were so numerous and worthwhile that his death is bound to seem like the end of a rich and never-to-be-repeated chapter in American Catholic life.

Some idea of Bishop Haas' influence for good may be had from considering only a few of his roles. At the time of his death Bishop of Grand Rapids, Michigan, he was the president of the Catholic Association for International Peace and also of the American Association for Labor Legislation. The founder of the Catholic Conference on Industrial Problems and a member of the National Conference of Social Work and many other organizations, Bishop Haas began his career as a teacher serving at St. Francis Seminary in Milwaukee, then at Marquette University and finally at the Catholic University of America in Washington.

The author of various works on sociology and collective bargaining, the best known of which was his recently revised textbook, *Man and Society*, Bishop Haas served on many government boards and committees both before and after his consecration. During World War II he was a member of a special conciliation board of the United States Department of Labor and as a special commissioner participated in the settlement of an estimated fifteen hundred labor disputes. During President Truman's Administration Bishop Haas also served as a member of his Committee on Fair Employment Practices and himself received various awards for fighting intolerance.

One of the first of what came to be called the "labor priests" in America, he was long hailed for his pioneer work in the field of social action. To those interested in Catholic social thought his consecration as Bishop in 1943 was a fitting reward for a life spent in efforts to translate Christian principle into social reality. Death came to Bishop Haas from a heart attack; despite, or because of, what he had already done, he will be sorely missed. *Requiescat in pace.*

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The Age of Advertising

THE ADS ARE A FORM OF MAGIC WHICH HAVE COME TO DOMINATE A NEW CIVILIZATION.

MARSHALL McLUHAN

MOST people must by now have seen the original advertisement featuring a Clifton Webb sort of gentleman wearing a white shirt and having a black patch over one eye. This advertisement sold a million Hathaway shirts in a few weeks, but few ever found out why. The ad was a piece of abstract art, of unabashed symbolism such as is reputed to outrage the ordinary man when he meets it in an art gallery, but which worked perfectly in the market place.

There is no accident about this. Symbolist poetry and painting were magical in theory and in practice, linking objects which had no logical connection. Modern advertising is a form of magic ("kissing sweet in five seconds"), and it employs all the techniques of symbolist art. It is a kind of Arabian Nights world of Aladdin lamps and genii who spring from bottles to do our bidding. In this world, as in the world of Omar Khayyam, the sorry scheme of things as they are is forever being remolded nearer to the heart's desire. So powerful is this feature of the huge artificial pictorialized neon-lighted environment created by advertising that people have got into the habit of living in that future environment which the ads promise. Not satisfied with the present, they live in those months ahead when the ice-box will be paid for or a course of beauty treatments and a psychiatric analysis will have brought romance and success into their lives. Advertising creates a promised land.

National brands of commodities like Coca-Cola or Lucky Strikes have a way of becoming a kind of totemistic institution. Totem societies were held together collectively by the totem plant or animal. A man was not a member of the Kangaroo clan or tribe. He was a kangaroo. He participated in the life of the kangaroo with his brothers. It was a kind of mystic communion or participation. Advertising, with its appeal to collective emotion, has set up national brands and totems for communal participation.

We are told that "you feel better satisfied when you use well known brands." To use a brand of car, drink, smoke, or food that is nationally advertised gives a man the feeling that he belongs to something bigger than himself. He is part of a process or a culture that contains and nourishes him. And the irrational basis of the appeals made to him by the ads reinforces his sense of mystic communion. National ads have naturally supplanted the flag in this respect. So that there was nothing surprising in the verdict of the GI's in the last war who decided that they were fighting for the American girl, associated in their minds with Coca-Cola, hamburgers, youth, and hygiene.

But a glance at the history of ads will correct any notion that our own time is especially grotesque. Not so long ago even tombstones had been used as advertisements, like this one in Paris:

> To the memory of M. Jabert, a most excellent husband and father. His inconsolable widow continues to carry on the grocery business in the Rue St. Denis.

An American newspaper a century ago carried this ad:

> Here lies Adolphe Black
> Who died at the age of 86 years
> in the possession of all his teeth,
> Thanks to the dentifrice wash of the
> house of X. and Co.

And there is the local casket company that sponsors a program for shut-ins.

TODAY advertising is a major industry, absorbing most of the artistic talent of our world. But the hook-up between artists and advertising is age-old. Leonardo da Vinci painted inn signs. The parvenu Medici family advertised themselves by hiring painters and sculptors to glorify them. In our century Salvador Dali does nylon ads. In fact, as handled by such commercial geniuses as Vollard and Duveen, modern painting has itself become a branch of advertisement—as any reader of *Vogue* should know. The big art dealers decide who will be the fashionable painters of the day. And the fashion magazines use these same fashionable painters, directly and indirectly, to promote turnover in textiles. The recent "Moulin Rouge," which featured José Ferrer's Toulouse-Lautrec as the advertising genius of a French cabaret, is a case in point. In America

Mr McLuhan, of St. Michael's College in Toronto, is the author of "The Mechanical Bride."

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the lay-out and design man for an ad might be a very great artist and nobody would ever discover it. We are so ashamed of our own commerical activities that we refuse to inspect our world for any symptoms of virtue or beauty which, we feel, could only creep into it by accident. The Puritans said in effect: life is very short and therefore our faces must be long. We are the new Puritans of technology rather than theology, and we say in effect: life is very cruel and therefore we must turn our faces away from it. We like roast beef and therefore we have slaughter-houses. But we despise the Spaniards who find meaning and dignity in the death of a bull.

With the arrival of display advertising, a major revolution occurred in the modern world. Life has been different since then. P. T. Barnum was really its father. It was he who broke the opposition to agate-type. Until a century ago the little advertisers had banded together against the big advertisers saying: "You shall have no big type or big lay-outs before us." It was the organized pressure of the little men who held back the big type battalions of the national display advertisers for fifty years. It was P. T. Barnum who smashed the dam of small agate type which still dominates the classified pages by taking over the whole newspaper as an advertising stunt. He showed the press how to use the feature story and the interview as advertising gimmicks. His press ballyhoo for the concert tour of Jenny Lind in 1850 taught America how to use the human interest story as advertising. Barnum saw clearly that the press was, from this point of view, a printed form of the circus sideshow of wonders and horrors. A few years later Macy's translated the lay-out of the newspaper merchandise page into the physical reality of the department store. If it was an advantage to have many kinds of bargains on one page, why not have them under one roof? The modern department store was the result of the new display advertising in the press.

I offer this merely as one example of the power of a change in the form of communication to produce further changes in the physical make-up of our social lives. And it suggests many reasons why we should take an intelligent interest in the art and engineering skills that are lavished on the commercial appeals of our world today.

MORE art and intelligence go into the design and lay-out of an ad in the *Saturday Evening Post* or *Life* than into stories and features in the same magazines. Why should this be so? The answer is simple. An advertisement in these magazines costs a great deal. It represents an investment as high as twenty-five thousand dollars for a single page in a single issue. That is the least of the matter. The initial investment is hitched to multi-million dollar production plants and

national sales networks. The magazine ad is a magical device contrived to create appetites and stir impulses in a vast reader mass. That page, like the cloud no bigger than a man's hand, is devised to release a storm of orders and to stimulate feverish production and distribution. Therefore, the layout of that page has to be exactly geared to the reader mass.

In order to achieve this end there has to be an elaborate series of consumer surveys to establish the exact character of the social groups whose dollars are to be magically extracted. Because of this the sociological studies conducted by modern industry far exceed in scope those of sociologists in the universities. The consumer surveys of modern industry can only be likened to the departments of military intelligence maintained by modern governments. And the advertising divisions of these departments of intelligence employ professors of psychology and anthropology. Why is Michigan chewing less gum this year? Send in the staff of experts to look over the psychology of the Michiganders. Perhaps it will be necessary to undermine some recently launched dentistry campaign for better teeth. Beer is best? Beer belongs? Of course. But why don't the people of Idaho have a sufficiently lively appreciation of this fact? Anthropologist Gardiner will find the answer in the social conditioning of that area.

Of course, nothing kills the power of an ad like paying conscious attention to it. Ideally, ads are most valuable as windows providing a rational view of the entire social and psychological landscape of our communities. But their magical power is felt only by those who think they don't read them. Ads are written to have their effect on those whose attention is distracted

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by the other items around them. And no ad has its meaning by itself. Anybody can prove this simply by cutting one out of a magazine and studying it, or by stopping and looking carefully at one. Soon he will begin to smile. Then to laugh. Ads are like the weird faces or masks used by witch-doctors to control the powers of nature. If one is merged in the tribal horde, that mask will look good to him. It may decide whether he will eat next year. To the outsider the same magical layout will seem comical.

Our own advertising layouts are so extremely funny that if we paid any serious attention to them we would soon be in stitches of laughter. The reason this does not happen is not that we have become hardened to these fantastic appeals to our passions, but that we have become so groggy, so passive, so helpless amidst the endless barrage of appeals that "we go about our business," as we say. But the business of the advertiser is to see that we go about our business with some magic spell or tune or slogan throbbing quietly in the background of our minds. There it subtly rearranges the pattern of our wishes and impulses like dinner music, the smell of cooking, or the sound of the surf. Today our whole society is reeling from copy-writer's shock as much as any soldier ever felt battle-shock. The battle of the name-brands is carried on with an unceasing and relentless intensity.

The important point about ads and fashions can be stated in a word. Fashion is the popular substitute for art. It is a constantly applied stimulus to our natural sluggishness. A kind of social tonic. From this point of view fashion is the life-blood of advertising. For if the ads are psychological machines hitched to the assembly lines of mass-production at the distribution end, it is only by an intense appeal to the new, the different, the latest model or gadget that those lines can be kept rolling. And if fashion is a popular substitute for art, it is equally true to say that art cannot dispense with fashion. The strange marriage between the two is presented in every issue of *Vogue,* for example, where the latest art mingles with the latest models.

The impact of modern advertising has been to substitute the jingles of the singing commercials for age-old nursery rhymes. It has provided a stream of images and phrases which carry much of the burden of ordinary greetings, quips, gags, and conversation. It has created a world in which everyone wants to be hep—"How'm I doin'?" It represents an enormous leveling process from which nobody is excluded.

There is a remark in Roy Campbell's study of the Spanish poet, Lorca, which, by contrast, brings all these matters into focus. Campbell is explaining how in a country like Spain, where rural people are not much affected by the new media of communication, great poetry and oratory are popular among the illiterate. Moreover, he says, "Spain is the last European country where conversation remains a popular art, and where the peasants, though illiterate, are as a rule so highly cultured that high society and intellectuals imitate their special accents and expressions out of snobbism—just as the new rulers of the [British] bureaucracy affect and imitate the accents which are current at the moment at Oxford and Cambridge."

Because the ads have created a world in which fashion dictates that each of us must always have enough cash to conform, success is the cash-ability to be like everybody else. Our fashions change rapidly so that to be in fashion takes a great deal of ready money. Apart from that simple requirement, nothing could be more democratic than our fashions which require uniformity as the mark of distinction. Our social culture today is, even at the intellectual level, mainly an affair of advertising. And ads, in turn, represent the main channel of intellectual and artistic effort in the modern world.

CATHOLICISM IN AMERICA X

Catholics and Social Reform

EDWARD A. MARCINIAK

ONE of the mature developments in American Catholic life is the movement for social reform. The history of the movement as well as most contemporary manifestations of it bear witness to this fact.

Mr. Marciniak is an executive of the Catholic Labor Alliance in Chicago, and editor of the labor paper, Work.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, American Catholic interest was not, by and large, prompted by a social philosophy. By following the main currents of public opinion, Catholics hoped to make the Church respectable and "American" and to ward off more persecution of the Know-Nothing kind. Cardinal Gibbons brought this first period to an end in

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1887 with his famous trip to Rome. In an unprecedented move he sought to have the Congregation of the Holy Office lift its condemnation against a U.S. labor organization, the Knights of Labor. And he succeeded.

The publication in 1891 of Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *On the Condition of Labor,* stimulated partly by Cardinal Gibbons' persuasive support of U.S. workingmen, ushered in a second stage in the Catholic social movement. Now its aim was to reform, in the light of Christian social principles, the evils of industrial society. It presented an alternative to the reform proposals of the socialists who reached the peak of their influence in the early 1900's. In the writings of Monsignor John A. Ryan, starting with his *A Living Wage* in 1906, in the efforts of Father Peter Dietz to mobilize Catholic organizations for social reform, in the lay pioneers of the German Catholic Central Verein who prodded the Catholic social conscience, a Christian program was formulated for overhauling capitalism.

The era reached its climax in 1919. In that year the bishops of the United States set up the Social Action department of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, with Monsignor Ryan as director, and issued the now famous *Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction.* This declaration, reading in retrospect like a handbook of the New Deal, called for: minimum wage laws; comprehensive social insurance for illness, unemployment and old age; laws against child labor; public employment services; government protection of the right to organize; cooperatives; government regulation of monopolies; graduated income, excess profit and inheritance taxes; sharing by workers in profits, ownership and management; and public housing.

Then came the third and current stage in Catholic social action. Its chief influences were the great depression of the 1930's, Pius XI's 1931 encyclical, *Reconstructing the Social Order,* the founding of *The Catholic Worker,* the writings of men like Father Paul Hanly Furfey and the late Dom Virgil Michel, the efforts of Father Raymond McGowan, Monsignor Reynold Hillenbrand and others. Out of this social ferment came a deepened vision of a Christian view of society, recalling the redemptive, incarnational mission of the Mystical Body of Christ in each generation. As a result those in the Catholic social movement today find their credentials not only in U.S. citizenship or union membership, for example, but also in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. They draw the spirit for social reform not only from the cries of the poor and oppressed but also from the liturgy, Christ's sacrifice, which is the prime source of the Christian spirit.

IT is a mark of the Catholic social movement's maturity that this religious deepening of its social spirit did not encourage sectarianism. Actually it promoted joint action among Catholics, Protestants and Jews. In few areas of American life has there been more cordiality and less suspicion among religious-minded men than in the field of social reform. The reason for this intercreedal good will is clear, says Father John LaFarge, S. J.:

> Catholic social action, in its different manifestations, has made perhaps the most marked impression upon the non-Catholic world of any form of Catholic activity during the last few years, chiefly because it grappled with problems in which non-Catholics are already deeply interested.

Testimony similar to Father LaFarge's would be volunteered by non-Catholic leaders in social action. For example, the Protestant writer Stanley Stuber in his *Primer on Roman Catholicism for Protestants* says: "If anyone is inclined to feel that the Roman Catholic Church is reactionary, he should examine its position in

regard to social and economic matters. It has pioneered in labor relations, both in principle and practice, for over half a century. . ." During the aftermath of World War II, Protestants, Jews, and Catholics pooled their views to draft four declarations: *Pattern for Peace* (an international world order), *Pattern for Economic Justice* (on economic reform), *Man's Relation to the Land* (on rural life), and *Human Relations in Modern Business* (on the responsibility of employers). Less formal statements were issued on anti-Semitism, fair employment practices, public housing, and other social questions.

Furthermore, when Monsignor (later Bishop) Francis J. Haas became a full-time chairman of the President's Fair Employment Practices Committee or when Monsignor John Boland was named full-time chairman of the New York State Labor Relations Board, no one demanded, in the name of the separation of church and state, that the priests remove their clerical collars before seating themselves at their government desks. They were not forced to give up their jobs as were nuns who

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resigned as public school teachers when school boards required them to doff their religious dress.

Not only will it be possible, I hope, to conserve this area of mutual trust but also to extend it. No real progress in social reform is possible without the unstinting cooperation of all men of good will; the tasks of economic, political and international reconstruction are of heroic proportions.

Traditional Catholic opinion has it that the Natural Law is the great unifying force. But our experience in social reform demonstrates the opposite. Our bond of unity with non-Catholics is not the Natural Law—censorship, gambling, government-in-education, birth control, divorce, prohibition, for example, are things that generate the greatest disagreement. On the other hand, we have found common ground with other men of good will in the tension of preventing a race riot, in the heartaches of providing homes for the poor, in helping displaced persons and migratory workers, and in the daily comradeship of social action.

Social action by Catholics matured with the realization that its object is the "salvation" of social institutions. The human person is part of, and influenced by, his culture, neighborhood, occupation, leisure time pursuits, social status, the theater, the press, and government. The humanization and Christianization of these social institutions is now the recognized duty of the reformer. In arriving finally at such a conception of our role we have had to resist two undeniably attractive temptations.

The first temptation came when we were told that personal reform is more important than social reform, as though one is opposed to or excludes the other. When, for example, an influential figure like Bishop Fulton J. Sheen writes, "It is a few saints rather than social crusaders that we need," is it any surprise that the temptation to forsake social reform is so appealing? I am sure Bishop Sheen believes that social reform is not opposed to personal reform. What the world needs, certainly, is saints, and among them saintly social crusaders. "One cannot be a saint and live the Gospel we preach," Cardinal Suhard said, "without spending oneself to provide everyone with the housing, employment, goods, leisure, education, etc., without which life is no longer human."

The second temptation arose when we were told to evaluate our work in social reform by the converts it produces. But adopting such an attractive but ulterior motive of proselytizing makes it difficult for us to join in free and friendly collaboration to humanize social institutions. Honest collaboration demands purity of purpose if reforms are to be accomplished. How can a Catholic who is primarily interested in finding converts, and only incidentally in interracial justice, sit down honestly with Jews and Protestants to discuss ways of banishing Jim Crow from medical institutions? Would he not be in the same position as a Jesuit seismologist who, after attending a scientific convention, would be required by his superiors to file a report on the number of conversions he made?

IT is a great achievement of the Catholic social movement that it has rendered to laymen the things of laymen and to priests the things of priests. Social reform belongs pre-eminently, though not exclusively, to laymen, while religious formation is the priestly task. The lag in social teaching during the last century would never have occurred had laymen been given their place in the life of Christianity and had Christianity been given its place in their public life. The 1891 encyclical *On the Condition of Labor,* issued more than forty years after *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848, might have been written much earlier if laymen had understood better their role as citizens and as Christians. For when laymen by-passed Christianity in their public life, society was emptied of its soul: Christ. When Christianity by-passed laymen in its liturgical, apostolic, and educational life, Christianity was emptied of its social content.

In the formation of social-minded laymen the priest occupies a central place—as our experience with specialized groups like the Young Christian Workers, the Christian Family Movement, and others indicates. Unless small groups of laymen are brought together to perfect themselves as citizens and as Christians, Christianity will withdrew even further from the world's marketplaces: the arts and letters, the legislature, the newsroom, and the school. What a radical transformation of social institutions would ensue if most of the nation's forty-five thousand priests met regularly with a small group for intensive supernatural and social—not political—growth.

The "salvation" of today's institutions, as the Catholic social movement recognizes, demands witnesses much more than apologists. Witnesses who will reveal the Christian mystery, whole and undefiled, by their devoted service in the political party, trade association, medical society, union or community organization of which they may be members. Witnesses who will not withdraw from the workaday world. Witnesses who will stay to help redeem it.

Such an approach was, I feel, behind Pope Pius XII's granting Catholics the world over permission to eat meat this year on Friday, May Day (a labor holiday in most countries). Despite a few raised eyebrows among Catholics, the Pope's action represented no break with tradition. The Church has usually tried to Christianize secular celebrations rather than eliminate them. There are, of course, some who prefer to pressure police commissioners into banning May Day parades. But the Christian witness, picking up Pius XII's lead,

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will try to lift the joy, the spectacle, and the celebration of May Day God-wards.

However, not everything about the Catholic social movement rates a cheer. There is still a great deal of ignorance among Catholics regarding the Church's social doctrine. The average workingman knows little or nothing of the Christian teaching on a living wage, social legislation, or the dignity of manual labor. Nor is it unusual to find Catholic workers, after a talk on the social encyclicals, asking: "Why haven't we heard about these things before?" There are northern neighborhoods solidly populated by Catholics who never hear that racial segregation is immoral. There are numerous Catholics whose views on the United Nations echo more faithfully the Chicago *Tribune's* isolationism than the Holy Father's keen awareness of the nations' interdependence.

Much has happened to dull the Catholic social conscience since the depression thirties. The social and economic status of American Catholics has improved rapidly. There are more middle-class Catholics than ever. The ordinary layman usually doesn't appreciate how vital is his active participation in movements for reform. And the conviction is widespread that social reform is the special function of the "labor priest," the social worker, the union leader, the legislator, or the "lay apostle." With a few notable exceptions, Catholic colleges do little to furnish leadership for social reform. And most of the large schools of commerce seldom turn out graduates who hope to rebuild the social system. Even the remarkable growth of social awareness in the Catholic press has been unable to halt the drift to the Right.

EVEN where we have progressed in teaching Christian social doctrine, we frequently interpret and apply that teaching without imagination. Instead of using a social encyclical as a starting point for creative thinking and social reform, we use it as a terminal point. We frequently utter no word, express no thought, which cannot explicitly be found in some papal document. The effects of this sterile approach are reflected in our discussions of the "industry council plan." Since Pope Pius XI first outlined this idea for reconstructing the social order, how many original applications have we made to the specialized economic problems of the United States? As commentators, some of us rehash Pius XI's ideas without developing them. Others of us emasculate his thought by forever preaching his "principles," but never applying them to the concrete and particular. Is it any wonder that some of our expositions of papal social teaching have been characterized as "pious papal prattle"?

We fail to understand that in an encyclical the Holy Father records and gives authority to a development in social teaching which must usually establish itself first in open debate and discussion. The social reformer must not only follow the encyclicals; he must also precede them. "Pioneers," Cardinal Suhard once said, "will be forgiven for making mistakes." Unfortunately, many of the mistakes by Catholics have seldom been on the side of an imaginative and creative approach to new problems. Our reactions have suffered from a conformity to familiar and hackneyed patterns.

DURING the last decade Catholic organizations along occupational lines—for policemen, post-office employes, retail clerks, white collar workers, firemen, doctors, newspaper people, railroad men, and others—have multiplied phenomenally. Our recognition of the need for associations of the occupational type is a welcome advance. But the centripetal direction of most such groups, with their *exclusive* emphasis on Communion breakfasts, holy hours, and similar religious practices, blocks the drive against secularism, and hence for social reform. The Christianization of economic institutions also requires centrifugal action, directing attention outwards to the moral problems of the trade, office, industry, or profession. I do not plead for Catholic blocs in the trades or professions; rather, I hope that existing Catholic organizations will increasingly become centers for moving laymen to judge the problems of their occupational environment in the light of the Gospel.

We sometimes overlook the fact that American opinion tends to be cynical about do-gooders in general and about social reformers in particular. It expects to find a hidden "angle" or vested interest in apparently unselfish causes. And it loves nothing better than to expose some do-gooding faker.

Public reaction to civic action by Catholics partakes of this cynicism, but it is also suspicious of a vested political motive. If we keep this fact in mind, we may avoid the habit of speaking out only on public issues with a Catholic interest, narrowly-conceived, like birth control or aid to education. One eastern Holy Name Society, silent all the years of its existence, broke silence this year with a protest against legal action being taken to ban bingo.

On the other hand, several Catholic groups this year actively supported civic measures designed to aid and improve public schools. Such action generates a climate for the cooperation of all men of good will in social reform. For no real progress in social reform is possible without the unstinting cooperation of Protestants, Jews, and Catholics. The tasks of economic, political, and international reconstruction are of heroic proportions. I pray that men of religious convictions will try, even at great personal sacrifice, to extend the common ground of social action.

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THE SCREEN

RIDING, RIDING

LIKE Alfred Noyes' highwayman, Laurence Olivier charges through "The Beggar's Opera" with a gusto that is a pleasure to behold. Whether he be courting the ladies (including his wife, pretty Polly Peachum, played by lovely Dorothy Tutin) or holding up a coach or gamboling in a tavern or gambling at the high-class gaming house, this Captain Macheath is done in the fine style and dashing spirits one expects from an actor with Olivier's talents; and while his singing won't bowl you over, he handles well the ballads assigned to him.

As a rule opera comes off in the movies as a rather static and stodgy affair, but not so with "The Beggar's Opera," which Producers Herbert Wilcox and Olivier have fashioned into a handsome film that is not afraid to be imaginative as well as arty. It's been a long time since I read John Gay's satirical comedy of the eighteenth century, so I'm not sure how much of the credit for this version should go to Gay, and how much to Denis Cannan for his screenplay and to Christopher Fry for his adaptation, additional dialogue and lyrics; but the amalgam is a delight. Of course this piece isn't opera at all, in the strict sense of the word, so the filmmakers felt no qualms about taking liberties. Sir Arthur Bliss modernized the score from traditional popular airs; and the good singing voices are a pleasure to hear even if in most cases you know they don't belong to the actors.

But because of the film's stunning staging, most of which was borrowed from Hogarth, photographed in Technicolor, and the excellent direction of Peter Brook, "The Beggar's Opera" shines brightest, as good cinema should, in its visuals. All the scenes have a lusty Hogarthian quality, and the good cast surrounding Olivier bring this hilariously funny and frankly vulgar story to life. Stanley Holloway as Lockit, the corrupt keeper of Newgate Goal, and Athene Seyler as Mrs. Trapes, whose kisses taste of gin, are right out of Hogarth and Gay. And so are most of the other characters as well as Peter Brook's mob scenes which fairly burst with vitality. To Producer-actor Laurence Olivier, who has so successfully turned this and other famous plays into movies, we paraphrase a stolen line: If this kind of cinema be fruit of love, play on.

AUDIENCES who just can't resist the swashbuckling film will find "The Master of Ballantrae" to their liking. Handsomely photographed in Technicolor in Scotland, Cornwall and Sicily, this Stevenson story is a natural for the movies, and abounds in derring-do. Under William Keighley's direction, Errol Flynn turns in his best performance in years as the misunderstood and misunderstanding master of Ballantrae Castle who goes off to fight for the Stuarts and winds up as a pirate before he can return to Scotland. With Flynn is a good English cast which includes Roger Livesey, Anthony Steel, Beatrice Campbell, and Felix Aylmer.

WHAT with so many actors going abroad to work these days, films are becoming more international than ever; and it's hard for a reviewer to tell which country should get credit for which movie. In any case, whatever country should feel flattered, "Sailor of the King" is a good movie. Valentine Davies wrote the script from C. S. Forester's novel *Brown on Resolution* and Producer Frank McCarthy and Director Roy Boulting have whipped it into an exciting movie of love and adventure.

Love comes first, and while this part has a pleasantly sentimental charm, it depicts no conventional romance. An unattached and unusually suppressed lady (nicely played by Wendy Hiller) and a junior officer in the British navy (portrayed by Michael Rennie) meet on a train, become attracted to each other and spend five days of love in an English country inn. After which they foolishly decide for the sake of his career not to marry. All this in 1917.

Time passes. The Officer, now a captain and unaware that the lady went to Canada and bore his child, has to make a big decision during a naval encounter in World War II. Again the officer fails to follow his better instinct, but his son proves a hero. These scenes were beautifully photographed in Malta—with Jeffrey Hunter playing the young Canadian; and Director Boulting has handled this section of the film in the best Hornblower tradition of daring and suspense.

I have been told that since I saw "Sailor of the King" several months ago, its ending has been changed. I'm sorry to hear this because the ending I saw had a grim and ironical note that romantic adventure films seldom accomplish. While the new ending is still effective, it is much more sentimental.

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

COMMUNICATIONS

"THE ROSENBERG CASE"

New York, N.Y.

TO the Editors: Coming back from France, it is a relief to find Robert Barrat's article on the Rosenbeg case in The Commonweal [August 14]. Reading the American newspapers abroad made one think that

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people in the U.S. had wholly dismissed the case from their minds. This still widened the abyss that lay between the two nations since the execution. French Catholics had been aghast at the American Catholics' attitude. It seems to me that *The Catholic Worker* alone saved the honor of American Catholicism in this tragic affair.

M. Barrat has given a clear, comprehensive, dispassionate and accurate report of the French attitude in the Rosenberg case. What he cannot convey (or perhaps chose not to) is the atmosphere in France during the fatal ten days in June. Those of us who were there will never forget it. From the rich boss to the street cleaner, from the Cardinal to the member of the Communist Party, there was but one talk, one concern, one effort. There were parades, of course, and huge meetings. But there were also dozens of small ones, and prayer gatherings in churches and synagogues. . . . Telegrams and letters to the White House poured in at the post office, and petitions filled the American Embassy. This was not a demonstration against America, it was like the pathetic supplication of a whole people to another that it remain worthy of the cause of mankind, the cause it claimed to have taken up and for which it also claimed France's support.

I left in the midst of the disruption of the recent strikes, but even then the Rosenberg case was paramount in the minds of the people one happened to meet, and the press still talked about it. For France and for several other European countries, the Rosenberg case is not closed. It cannot be for us in the United States either.

CLAIRE HUCHET BISHOP.

"THE CHURCH TODAY"

Chicago, Ill.

TO the Editors: As the publishers of the pastoral letters of Emmanuel Cardinal Suhard in the United States, we at Fides would like to append a note to the letter on "The Church Today" by Victor C. Ferkiss in your August 21 issue.

We have conscientiously tried to discover to which pastorals of Suhard Mr. Ferkiss has addressed his letter. Certainly not to the early Suhard letters on the parish, the family, and property, for these are, as several reviewers have pointed out, merely reaffirmations of Papal teaching on these subjects. On the other hand, the later pastorals of Suhard on "The Meaning of God" and the Priesthood are surely theological statements, not at all hampered by what Mr. Ferkiss calls a "basic and narrow historical and geographical conditioning."

Does Mr. Ferkiss, then, direct his remarks only to "Growth or Decline?," Suhard's pastoral on the Church in our times? If so, his letter is somewhat unfair. Our anthology includes much more.

The question thus remains: Does Ferkiss have a case when he discusses "Growth or Decline?" To answer this, I would like to use the words of Robert Rouquette, which appeared in his article in *Thought* last spring, entitled, "The Evolution of the French Church," for he sums up the recent revival in French Catholicism.

> A well-organized and thoughtful *social Catholicism* has become conscious of the urgent problems posed by the massive irreligion of the proletariat and the irreligion nourished by social injustice; a whole generation of young Catholics grown to maturity between the two wars can no longer conceive a Christianity except as radiating and apostolic. From them springs *Catholic Action,* that is, the assumption of responsibility on the part of the laity in a work of social transformation inspired and animated by the demands of the Gospel and the faith. These young Catholics are rediscovering the sacramental reality of Christian marriage; young Christian families living their marriage spirituality, making their union a triumphant witness of charity, are perhaps the most fruitful sources of strength of the French Church. Around them have been founded the most effective apostolic undertakings.
>
> The clergy is becoming increasingly aware that the pastoral methods inherited from past centuries, clerical authoritarianism, the dispersal of forces, the individualism of parish or of diocese, must be left behind; a whole movement seeks to promote a greater sense of community life and thought on the part of priests, and a greater participation of laymen in the prayer and in the apostolic action of the clergy. A considerable effort is being made almost everywhere to understand the worker, to share his healthy aspirations, to answer his needs.

Certainly, these are the aspirations which emerge from all the pastoral letters of Cardinal Suhard, and in particular, from his "Growth or Decline?." The questions remains for Mr. Ferkiss and for all American Catholics to answer: which of these aspirations are *not now* needed in the United States?

Certainly, the publication of the social encyclicals, or the works of men like Aquinas, Augustine, Newman, or Von Ketteler in the United States do not reflect a basic lack of intellectual vigor or creativity in American Catholicism. Neither does the publication of Suhard. Rather, all of this sharing of intellectual discoveries bears witness to the universality of Catholicism. It will be a happy day when we in the United States can make similar contributions to the universal Church of Christ.

We at Fides are honored to have presented Suhard to the English-speaking world. . . .

VINCENT J. GIESE,
Editorial Director,
Fides Publishers Association.

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OF NOTE

AUTHORITY

IN a recent issue of *Blackfriars* (St. Giles, Oxford, England), Archbishop Roberts, S.J., writes "On Commending Authority." Formerly Ordinary of the Archdiocese of Bombay, Archbishop Roberts is now residing at Oxford. Excerpts from his article follow:

> To *commend* authority: that, equally with asserting God's authority, is our Lord's purpose in founding His Church. Obviously, to commend is incomparably more difficult than to assert. The twin dangers used by the devil as a fifth column inside the Church have always been love of money and love of power. We cannot get on without authority or without money. Our needs are the Devil's opportunity. What we take up as a means we tend all too soon to make an end in itself. That is the story of every reformation in the Church, from within and from without.
>
> The use of power is an issue vital to every generation. It has never been more urgent than today, in a world all but reduced to ruins by totalitarian abuse of authority. We tended in the last war to equate the Christian ideal of government with "democracy." The obvious objection to that is that Christianity may be saddled with the defects, so painfully apparent, of "government by the people for the people." Both in England and in America (witness Blanshard's *American Freedom and Catholic Power,* and *Communism, Democracy and Catholic Power*) there is a movement to represent this democracy as threatened by Rome quite as much as by Moscow.
>
> May not the answer be, in these countries especially, to stress more than we do the *motive* of Christian obedience—always, that is, to see the authority of God in anyone who holds his warrant: the father in the family; the Bishop in the Church; the King, President or Parliament in the State. The problem of choosing the most effective instrument of civil government is most complicated and difficult; the finest instrument in theory may prove a tyranny or a machine of bungling inefficiency if the proper attitude to authority is wanting, either in those who exercise it or in those who have chosen it.
>
> The light which our Lord commanded Christians to show to the world to be seen by all men for the glorification of His Father, is such use of authority as the first Pope required of Bishops—a pattern, model and example to the whole world; the most vivid contrast must be presented between the Christian attitude of humility and the pagan use of authority "lording it over" subjects.
>
> Again, concrete examples: certainly and rightly Christian "democrats" regard the right of criticizing their government as an essential factor in their loyalty. In England's very blackest hour, a harassed Prime Minister was being fiercely attacked in Parliament; Sir Winston Churchill proclaimed his pride that such a thing should be possible at such a time of crisis. He would have resented passionately the imputation that the sharpest criticism of his policy involved the least suspicion of disloyalty. There is room, I think, for a great deal more consideration of such a fact than we Catholics usually give to it.
>
> That the government of the Church is divinely committed to the Pope and Bishops does not mean that this authority is not *for* the people. It is for the people to a degree beyond anything that the most fanatical democrat ever thought of. The Pope may or may not delegate to the laity—there has, in fact, been immensely greater variety of such delegation according to time and place than is realized. Whether he does or not, it is humanly impossible to exercise authority without consulting the governed. To deny this is to make nonsense of democracy.
>
> The Kings and Prophets who governed God's Chosen People were indeed appointed by Him; nonetheless, there seems to have been the fullest approval for extremely frank comment; nothing could be clearer than the distinction between the dignity of the office and the merits of the person. Their Lord, when He came on earth was *Himself* the pattern that Saint Peter was later to emulate. Martha addressed her complaint not to Mary but to her guest.
>
> Of countless examples in the early Church the most striking is the stern rebuke of the first Pope by one who was certainly not Saint Paul at that moment, but a convert notorious for a campaign of savage persecution. Both in the Acts of the Apostles and in their letters, there is overwhelming evidence of differences of opinion discussed with perfect frankness.
>
> Not to beat the air: has the principle that guides us in feeding our bodies any application in the nourishment of our souls? We chose the government which instituted in wartime a system of fair rationing which became the admiration of the world; we believed, and rightly, that the system required constant watchfulness from our servants in Parliament. Are we to believe that the human imperfections requiring such a check and stimulus are miraculously removed from the pastors appointed to feed our souls? In the course of visits paid to ports in twenty-six countries I came across

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anomalies which, had I not seen, I could hardly have believed. To take only one example, till recently there was, or perhaps even is now, a port where certain dispensations for the benefit of sailors were available in a few of the docks but not in the others! (Three dioceses were involved). Imagine (if you possibly can) anything comparable in the distribution of bodily food; and were it to be said that people get the kind of government they deserve, may that not apply to those who don't care sufficiently about their souls to represent their needs, and represent effectively? (In fact, the apostolic practice of daily Communion, in abeyance for so many years, was not restored just by a stroke of the papal pen. Effect was given to our Lord's wish because some people expressed decisively—yes, at the risk of being hurt—the hunger they felt.) The same is true of recent facilities for evening Mass and non-fasting Communion, and indeed of every other reform that has ever been. Had Catholics done nothing about this, their passivity might have been called obedience, but hardly in Heaven. . . .

There is no divine guarantee that the Church will be healthy if deprived of the bracing public opinion recognized as the lifeblood of any intelligent democracy (or for that matter, any religious order) where consultation and representation is, or should be, brought to the highest pitch. Holy Scripture, tradition and history all affirm the principle of collective responsibility of Catholics for the Church that is theirs. It should not have been necessary for the Holy Father to re-affirm a truth so demonstrable, but as he evidently did find it necessary, here are his words, addressing an international gathering of Catholic pressmen in February, 1950. He stated the functions of a free press as known to all of us, and then went on: "The Church is a living body and something would be lacking to her life if expression could not be given to public opinion within it. For such a lack, both pastors and the faithful might be to blame."

COMING SPECIAL ISSUES OF

The Commonweal

September 25	**Back to School**
October 30	**Fall Books**
November 20	**Children's**
December 4	**Christmas Books**

BOOKS

The Private Necessity

RICHARD HAYES

THE poet Randall Jarrell is only the latest to warn that we have wrought another Alexandrian age, and have ringed our literature about with a formidable wall of harsh and disputatious opinion: some of it humane, a quantity of it intelligent and useful, but too much of it "graceless, joyless . . . written by a syndicate of encyclopedias for an audience of International Business Machines." For the critic, engaged in his justifying act, there is the awareness that he contributes with each gesture to this monolithic slag-heap; for the reader, the humiliating knowledge that his attention is collusive. Yet each surely is wronged by so denigrating a vision, for is not the power to discriminate, to refine and qualify a supreme human function, and does it not impel respect?

Two recent collections of personal criticism throw a light on this. One is Mr. V. S. Pritchett's *Books in General* (*Harcourt, Brace.* $3.50.), the other Professor Gilbert Highet's *People, Places and Books,* (*Oxford.* $3.50.). Both gentlemen are bookish, neither academic, and both are, to a certain benign degree, engaged in masquerades: Professor Highet in that of the entertainer, all but successfully concealing the hard, muscular core of his thought; Mr. Pritchett in the role of the naked sensibility, when I should define him as a prophet in search of a dogma. What distinguishes each is voracity—a positive richness of experience—and a passionate commitment to the virtue and rightness of the private self in a public world.

Books in General is a third volume from the writer whom one may call, with justice, the most striking and active critic of prose fiction the decade has produced. With the exception of a mordant and combustible study of Arthur Koestler, all of the essays here included have appeared in *The New Statesman and Nation,* the journal of which Mr. Pritchett is so vigorous and visibly authoritative an editor. It is a limited collection: no drama, no poetry (but for Clough, and here the technique is fictional), no—what I shall call for want of a better word—"reflections." But beyond this, an immersion in prose, a wild indiscriminateness: the English hierarchy (Sterne, Swift, Meredith, Boswell, the Carlyles, Lawrence, Butler); views of the contemporary Gide, Faulkner, Wyndham Lewis; an admirable tour through the splendor of French and Russian fiction, and finally the exotic: Ouida, Cellini, Svevo, Firbank.

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In the preface to an earlier volume, Mr. Pritchett declined the post of judgment: "I was too idle and specific in my enquiry to call myself a critic," he wrote, noting that his sentiments were rather those of one who came out of darkness "into some bright and crowded room where things and people become ineffaceably vivid . . . it was that dazzled moment of entry that I sought to set down." Each of these essays records this abrasive instant of contact: one is witnessing the intelligence not in recollection, nor the construction of theory, but in the intimate process of penetrating and possessing experience. The sexual analogy may be further extended: there is an extreme repose here, a feminine openness; but, conversely, an exhausting expense of spirit. The casual critical imagination, with its softness and self-indulgence, must surely scatter in dismay before the quantity of moral energy Mr. Pritchett commands in his quiet, characteristic performance.

IT is the nature of the mind which is original, sober and first-class to surrender its essence with difficulty. And so, while perception and sensibility glitter here boldly as mica in a fresh quarry of stone, they indicate but the felicity of Mr. Pritchett's talent, not its caliber. That is something which must be approached circuitously. One works through his prose, a remarkable instrument with that uncommon attribute, masculine grace; and then through his brilliant use of metaphor, which is always a concentration, never a display. He will write, for instance, of the novels of Wyndham Lewis as "old block-busting guns and tanks skewed on the abandoned field . . . fantastic without their thunder;" and of the novelist Ouida spiraling "in that luscious upper air—somewhere between Mayfair and the moon—where the super ego practises its incredible scales and beats its frightful bosom;" or of the Carlyles in their fort at Craigenputtock, "with the old warrior upstairs, bloody and unbowed, and herself the sentinel below." I should note, too, how memorably Pritchett conveys what can only be called posture, leaving on the retina the image of Henry James at his lonely desk, obedient to his terrible law, "turning matter into spirit as fast as Emerson," or of Butler with "the sword never back in the scabbard," or Ouida in her waxwork setting, "enthroned in an enormous bed scratching away fast with a quill pen on large sheets of violet-tinted paper," and throwing them to the floor to be guarded by one of her numberless hounds.

But one arrives finally at the private place, and grasps the thread on which each of these studies is strung. That would seem to be a preoccupation—recurrent, dominating—with "that transcendent will which is incessant in men and women of genius." The vocabulary again surrenders a clue: it is not by chance that the words "egotism" and "genius" figure consistently

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as poles of reference, and the image of the magnifying glass, with its corollary of distortion. An interest in the outsize character has always marked Pritchett's fiction, but here the vein is even richer. It is mania which gives a spine to this volume: the mania of Cellini (for whom "life was a vendetta") and Firbank with his "wailing, brain-splitting peacock laugh:" of James to whom "method had become a divinity," or the Carlyles' "obdurate and primitive . . . craving for the other's voice." There is mania in T. E. Lawrence working out his "destiny of thought" among the Arabs; in the aged Tolstoy, turning to "mutilate unbearably his instinct and his civilization;" in Sterne, to whom "only the life lived in fantasy was tolerable," and Meredith cooking "even the dullest, the flattest things in hyperbole," and Poe, playing his role in the "orchestrated tragedy" of life, and coming onto the stage among his grotesque properties—"the pit of the Inquisitor, the rotting ancestral mansion, the luxurious Disraelian palace or the jeweled valley."

Figures in an age of sensibility: and to them Pritchett's attitude is one of ambiguous and transfixed horror, but occasionally the outraged human cry breaks through. "There is a kind of pathos," he remarks of an entry in the James notebooks, "in knowing that presently this bright bit will be lost to life and become an anonymous, altered and perhaps undecipherable piece in the forbidding structure of a work of art." But then, he notes justly that "the great are monsters of efficiency, the mills work day and night." It is specifically this preoccupation with a single, powerful theme which gives *Books in General* a value beyond the aesthetic or the critical—indeed lends the volume something of the weight of a seminal essay on the lineaments of the human personality. For what finally smolders beneath the cool and flinty surface of these studies is the importunate sensibility of a man for whom—as Alfred Kazin once said of Melville—reality is *fabulous*: a conviction which, whatever its peripheral destruction, must in the end always vivify, chasten and sustain.

PROFESSOR Highet, succeeding Mr. Pritchett, would seem almost aphasic. Like the heroine of one of Jean Stafford's short stories, whose "pretensions needed brushing . . . ambiguities needed to be cleaned . . . evasions would have to be completely overhauled," he arrives in a charming but rather shabby state. Lo, the impoverished self! But of that particular self, Professor Highet makes much—indeed, must, for the whole structure of his book is erected on personal authority. Authority is certainly Professor Highet's: one has only to recollect the judicious wit of his essay on the academic profession, or the beautiful free-wheeling intelligence of his survey of the permanent classical patterns.

But the self, too, has charm: alternately spiky and eloquent, laced with shrewdness and brandy humor, it regards you from the book jacket with an immemorial Scottish—I suppose *canniness* is the only (inadequate) word. Some of Professor Highet's most felicitous people are Sir William Osler, Henry Fowler and Donald Francis Tovey; he writes of Oxford with a plangent and reverberating affection, and he is a conspicuously acute commentator on Mr. Hutchins' Syntopicon, the abuses of contemporary satire, and the changing currents of the translator's art. I do not imagine I shall readily forget Mr. Highet unpacking the Great Books, opening a volume at random, reading (and then hastily shelving):

> Every segment bounded by a parabola and a chord Qq is equal to four-thirds of the triangle which has the same base as the segment and equal height.

But Professor Highet has been called up for court-martial. He has not established his big guns on the critical Maginot Line; he is not lobbing heavy shells into enemy territory, and the front-line Rommels of *myth* and *ambiguity* (seventy times seven) are bloody well indignant about it. Dereliction of duty? Hardly. Professor Highet was never that kind of warrior. He has spoken modestly on subjects which have often been immoderately inflated, and he addresses himself to the common reader certainly with less distinction but surely with more accuracy than Mrs. Woolf, whose reader may have been a full man but was hardly a common one. Several of these notes are admittedly restive beneath the intractable expectations of hard covers, but no one fails of its civilized and agreeable flavor. Nor should one forget, in our search after that something which makes for righteousness, the beneficence of Professor Highet's voice on the airwaves, the medium for which these talks were originally prepared.

How well, finally, they compliment each other—the English bard and the Scotch reviewer! How much pleasure we take in their company: not in the overstuffed library, dimly perceived among the vapors of departed dons, and littered with the musty cigars and clouded port of "old books, old wine, old friends"—but in some immeasurably more vital and effective sphere where both brain and heart are fed constantly by a nourishing shower of sense and sensibility. Mr. Pritchett and Professor Highet assert the worth and validity of the critical intelligence; they are evidence that only privacy, only the personal operating within the bonds of discipline, can propel literature out of institutionalization, out of the Alexandrian desert. And what they teach again, in a very small, a tentative way, is what it means to be human, to be a self—with its attendant anguish, its insoluble complexity and hard, irreducible center of glory. It is good and reassuring to know that the rock of Western humanism, over which so many propagandists daily swarm, can still—at the unexpected stroke—give forth such healing waters.

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A Criticism of Criticism

POETRY AND THE AGE. By Randall Jarrell. Knopf. $4.

By PATRICK F. QUINN

BOOKS about modern poetry have been appearing with such frequency of late that it will soon be difficult to devise catchy titles for them. One is reminded of a vogue of the thirties: the fashionable enigma in those days was Marxism. But for the many who were interested in reading the latest book on what Marx really meant there was only a handful of hardy souls willing to go through with a reading of *Das Kapital*. So today: contemporary poetry has not much of an audience, but books offering to explain the subject keep getting published.

Randall Jarrell is himself a poet, and he therefore has good reason to be annoyed with this state of affairs. However, it is not merely a personal complaint that he wants to register. When literary criticism somehow takes precedence over literature, things are indeed standing on their heads, and a vehement protest is certainly in order. This protest is made in the best essay in the book, a superb salvo called "The Age of Criticism." Bringing up all the heavy and light artillery of his erudition and wit, Mr. Jarrell fires away at the extravagant prestige that has in recent years apparently become the critic's birthright. In this age of criticism, he says, we are tending more and more to value stories and poems only as the "data" or "raw material" for criticism. Bad enough that so few people are seriously interested in reading; worse still is the tendency of this remnant to be concerned less with the actual story or poem than with someone's analysis, interpretation, or exegesis of it.

But then why, we may ask, are we given another volume of criticism by a man who argues so well that we have had too much of it already? Mr. Jarrell doesn't raise this question, perhaps because his answer would appear impossibly smug. He would say, I think, that his own brand of criticism is different from, is better and more useful than, those excessively wrought specimens of the critic's craft that have been turned out, as if on lathes, in the machine shops of the literary quarterlies.

He would have a point. Mr. Jarrell's distinction as a critic is that he can be brilliant without being brittle. He can write like an expert without sounding like a specialist. A good critic, in his opinion, is simply an extremely good reader "who has learned to show others what he saw in what he read." With this criterion in mind, he goes about his business sensibly and skillfully. Never ponderous or fine-spun, he yet can write with earnestness, penetration, and sometimes, when need be, with eloquence. His jokes are excellent in themselves, and at the same time they establish his meanings precisely and memorably. He is not afraid to "enthuse" over something he likes, quoting a passage and recording an immediate, unprocessed reaction of admiration and delight. These and other features of his style give the book a flavor of freshness that is very rare in contemporary criticism, perhaps unique.

Mr. Jarrell is original also in his choice of subject matter, but this is a mixed blessing. He devotes most of his space to poets who have not yet been given their critical due, notably Frost, Whitman, Marianne Moore, and W. C. Williams. This procedure is fair enough, and since no critic is uniformly good on everything he takes up it would be unfair to demand that he write as persuasively about Williams as he does about Frost. However, it is puzzling to find that in a book called *Poetry and the Age* Mr. Jarrell is willing to take up Walter de la Mare and Alex Comfort but not Yeats and Eliot. If poetry is what we are talking about, then the present age is either the age of Yeats or the age of Eliot. Odd that so good a critic should have found less important and less interesting fish to fry.

The explanation seems to be that this is not precisely a *book* that Mr. Jarrell has written; it is an anthology that he has put together. It is, to be sure, a valuable and distinguished anthology. But it hardly seems cricket to round up one's articles, introductions, and lectures, and serve them up as a treatise on poetry and the age. Every essay in this volume has appeared in print at least once before. Here they all are again, handsomely printed and bound by Knopf, but lacking any unifying principle except that conferred by the style and personality of their author. Since he writes unusually well, this is a considerable asset. But from a writer like Mr. Jarrell, who believes that the critic's ego should be severely subordinate to the critic's subject, we have a right to expect a more thoroughly integrated account of modern poetry, and we may hope that some day he will give it to us.

An Attempt At Utopia

THE PEOPLE CALLED SHAKERS. By Edward Deming Andrews. Oxford. $6.

By JOHN COURNOS

MR. Andrews has subtitled his objective yet not unsympathetic history of the Shakers, "A Search for the Perfect Society." In the absence of a definition of what "a perfect society" should be, we must inevitably, after reading this valedictory of the vanishing sect, arrive at the conclusion that what the author really means is "a good life," and in a very literal sense.

The beginnings of Shakerism, an offshoot of Quakerism, were very curious indeed. It came into being, with no little fuss, in the late eighteenth century in England, at a time when Joanna Southcott, a servant girl of Devonshire had "escaped from the reality of sex to find satisfaction in fantasy," and it sought to redeem the race with a new interpretation of the fall in the Garden of Eden.

Ann Lees, the earliest virtual

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leader of the Shakers, a woman wholly illiterate, also suffered a revulsion from sex after losing her four young children; she could not abide her husband, a blacksmith, a good-humored fellow, "kind according to nature," but apparently unsuited to his temperamental wife. Ann had gotten the notion that she had lost her infants as payment for her sins of concupiscence—concupiscence which indeed was the source of the world's wrongs: war, disease, slavery, crime, exploitation, famine, inequality of the sexes, human depravity, etc.

Ann Lees' chief contribution to Shakerism was the idea of the equality between male and female; her disciple, Meacham, further evolved the idea in a theological sense by proclaiming that Jesus having come "complete in his own glorious person . . . it was necessary that he should make his second appearance in the second part of man," that is woman; consequently, Meacham said, He had indeed now made His second appearance in the person of Ann Lees!

It were best to refrain from comment on so wild a claim on part of the Believers, as the Shakers called themselves, or the "crazy society of Neskyeuna Shakers," as the less polite Herman Melville called them. It would be more to the point to examine their practical works, since it is by these that the world today knows them. It is scarcely to be questioned that they have been a humane, ethical, sincere folk, as well as frugal and industrious, living on the fruits of their labors, and sharing with their neighbors. They had all things in common, subject however to the rule of the Elders. Theirs was a primitive communism. Visitors who saw the settlements commended the practice of the Shaker utopias, though others condemned it for its dullness and monotony. This was inevitable; the Shakers excluded from their conversation all sacred, literary and artistic topics. "Culture" was tabooed.

Indeed, their existence was based on taboos. Celibacy was consistently advocated. The men and the women maintained themselves in virtual segregation. Among the "orders" we read that "Brethren and sisters may not pass each other on the stairs;" that "Brethren and sisters may not write to each nor to each others, without liberty from the Elders." To be sure, the Shakers had their own peculiar dances, sometimes frenzied and wild, in which the women and the men kept more or less to sides, perhaps a shrewd device to give an outlet to their pent-in spirits. In short, they shut out temptation rather than resisted it. They had built up an "iron curtain" against the world.

Waste Land

THE DEAD BOY AND THE COMETS. By Goffredo Parise. Farrar, Straus & Young. $3.

By SERGE HUGHES

THIS is a dirge in the form of a novel. A lamentation for an Italian fifteen-year old shot fighting for no cause and no beliefs a short time after the close of the last war. In his short time the boy had experienced past endurance the meaninglessness, disorder, and discontinuity of his days. Fountains with winged horses that did not signify anything. Bridges arching over yellowing river beds. Churches turned into sweat-stenched movies. The impulse to kill the caged eagle in the zoo, stoning it, covering its beak with spit, shooting it. Before its last spasm, the boy's sloping life had been held up by the love of a girl, Edera. That love had not been strong enough. It did not steady the boy in the swirl. It did not bring peace, much less happiness, to him after death. After death he could only try to keep together the scraps of flesh that will not die at once but seek with the scant life left in them to perpetuate themselves in the light and warmth of the sun. That is how the living-dead the boy had known in his life had sought to perpetuate themselves, though they did not see the sun but endured in their small dark rooms reeking of ointments and littered with discarded, stained bandages.

The search the boy's best friend, Fiore, made for him after death

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brought only a deeper confirmation of the unbreakable grasp in which immobility and decay held him. There could be no hope.

In this brilliantly uneven work so reminiscent in mood and atmosphere of the horror visions of Kafka and Juenger, there is a remarkable talent for the meticulously detailed, the consummately realized moment. A flair for the mood, the shocking image, the quietly perverted. There are also signs of an irremediable crack in the very center of the work. The author does and does not want this to be an allegory. So overpowering is his interest for the detail and so absorbed does he become that he abandons the ambiguity of allegory . . . but only for a time. And where there is allegory, yearning and compassion appear. Elsewhere bleakness and denial. Such brilliance and unevenness point to an important writer. The future will reveal him, with his mastery of the mood, as either a craftsman of cold, twisted cameos, or an artist with the plenitude of expression.

Patterns of Transition

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY. By Elizabeth Taylor. Viking. $3.

By ADRIENNE FOULKE

WHEN Vinny comes down to the little sea resort to offer practiced consolation to an old friend, he stands in Isabella's living room, staring at the sea which has recently swallowed her husband, and he glimpses below on the sand the mysterious figure of a woman. She moves quickly into and beyond his range of vision but in those few moments he has been caught up in a pursuit which is to change his life.

The concern in this novel (which the reader instantly shares) is with people in transition, moving from one pattern of life to another: Isabella drifts from a conventionally settled marriage through bereavement into the frivolities of the Turkish baths; her son, Lawrence, escapes from the servitude of his inarticulate adolescence and a deep-bitten inferiority toward some capacity for independence, pleasure and happiness which, with unerring instinct, he looks for through a simple servant girl; Vinny is the romantic, dallying bachelor whose mauve masculinity takes on deeper, surer tones as he moves toward his first genuine experience of love; and Emily, the strangely beautiful recluse, hiding in the refuge of her sister's possessiveness, must be lured back to life.

Mrs. Taylor possesses a fine sense of the interplay of feeling. She also possesses so fine an ear for the English idiom that her American readers will be reminded how we only partly share this "common language" of ours, for by listening carefully, as one must, to her speech, we discover differences in responses and attitudes between ourselves and a people with whom we are prone to assume a

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too great likeness or identity at the expense of failing to see them and ourselves as we really are.

Also, in this novel, which is her fifth, Mrs. Taylor again exhibits a meticulous craftsmanship, being seriously concerned with the problems of form and structure. Many authors write with notable insight, comprehension and imagination, but fewer manage, as does she, to fix definitely and irrevocably the rationale of her characters' lives by an artistry which forestalls question: this is the way it all was and nothing could have been otherwise.

"Michiana"

311 CONGRESS COURT. By Richard Sullivan. Holt. $3.

By WILLIAM PFAFF

"MICHIANA" is the mushy title given to the area where Indiana and Michigan meet. It is not an exciting part of the country, being in many ways an appendage of Chicago, and possessing a tradition of steel, isolationsm, and basketball. The weather is violently cold and epidemically hot, with only hasty, beautiful, yellow autumns.

If you want to write a saga you go to Mississippi, where the roots are huge, tangled and deep. Or you go to Southern Indiana or Chicago or the West, where there is a past and a romance that towns like Mishawaka will never know. You would not go to Michiana, because there is nothing there but industrial, middle-class Americans. But Richard Sullivan is only interested in people, particularly in industrial, middle-class, small-city people.

His town is in Michiana. He calls it Baysweep, and all his novels have been located there. He has written about Baysweep's citizens: a prominent man (*First Citizen*), a struggling young couple (*Summer After Summer*), and now in *311 Congress Court* he turns to an older couple, their three daughters, and their remarkable old uncle.

The tidy plot line has to do with the selling of the family home. But that is less interesting to the reader than it is to Sullivan. What are interesting are the individuals: Layo, the father, a furniture craftsman; his still-young, overwhelmingly practical wife, Vicky; and his assortment of daughters (and assortment is the word).

Sullivan's success in this book is the success of a brilliant craftsman, and comes because he knows these people, what they wear, what they think and how they are free; what the dimensions are of their lives, and why they are happy. He has a fine eye, humor, and compassion.

I do not know of any writer who is better able to realize the quiet, small-city life of the Midwest. He does not make ordinary people into conventional people, and his people in this small novel are far too sweaty, far too funny, far too knowledgable to be symbols. Each of Sullivan's characters is singular. You meet them as you do the people in your life. Each is new; each is remembered past the day of departure.

Writing about his writing, you flail around for a proper description, and you keep coming back to the single word, people, and the banal statement that in this book they live.

REVIEWERS

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MAUROIS

Andre Maurois first gained fame from a book about an Englishman, "The Silences of Colonel Bramble." He followed that with a biography of an Englishman, Shelley. His work, like that of a number of the best contemporary writers, has been in that area which cannot precisely be called French, or English—or American. It is part of the common mind of the West, our world.

Maurois' articles in The Commonweal were Western, rather than French. He wrote in the early thirties on English-French relations. In 1937 he wrote for this magazine on parliamentary democracy, and followed that with an article on American economics, and with a delicate and very funny essay on the literary "admirer" and his master.

But it was in 1934 that he did an analysis of his own people which has interest to viewers of the France of 1953. It concludes with these remarks:

"England conducts her political life without a constitution, grants justice without a code, and counts on peace of Europe with contradictory devices and hazardous perceptions. France wants charters, signed guarantees. England thinks it dangerous to hope to bank up a universe whose uprising cannot be foreseen. France believes in plans, in superstructures, in design firmly, carefully conceived. . . . Such contrasts between the national systems of ideas give birth to misunderstandings which, since the Great War, have made European life trying. But the French people love peace. One day an old peasant woman of Cocherel said to M. Briand, 'There mustn't be any more war. It disturbs so many people.' That was a characteristically French way of putting the matter. The restrained wording, the force of the idea, the passion for toil—all that is the perfect expression of the French middle class."

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